

Army scorpion expert in Kuwait stung by insect, irony

Sgt. Sarah Scully, 40th Public Affairs Detachment, Army News Service
2006-11-03

WASHINGTON (Army News Service, Nov. 2, 2006) - The irony stung worse than the scorpion. A soldier dedicated to studying dangerous wildlife recently got attacked by one of the aggressive fat-tailed scorpions he spent months warning other Soldiers to avoid.

Capt. Stephen Garvin, an entomologist with the 981st Medical Detachment supporting 3rd Army/U.S. Army Central in Kuwait, made a routine visit to a portable toilet at Camp Buehring around 5 a.m. Oct. 5 when he felt something crawling on his right ankle. Thinking it was a fly, he smacked the offending insect with his left foot and ground it against his ankle - and that's when he felt the sting.

"I knew it was a scorpion as soon as it stung me," said Garvin, a 33-year-old active-duty Soldier from Stillwater, Okla. "My first thought was, 'I can't believe this is happening.'"

After stomping on the 2-inch scorpion a few times to make sure it had died, Garvin scooped it up using toilet paper and immediately sought medical attention. He recognized the crushed arachnid as one of the top three deadliest scorpions in the world, capable of killing a person in seven hours. Within an hour and a half of the venom injection, Garvin suffered extreme nausea, headache and dizziness.

"Things happened so fast; that's when I started getting concerned. I called the doctor over and said, 'Something's wrong,'" said Garvin, who passed out 10 minutes later and didn't wake up until the next evening.

Garvin was quickly airlifted to Camp Arifjan, put on a respirator and given an anti-venom shot. He has slowly recovered and endured a 10-day migraine as a result of the scorpion's sting.

He had a "classic presentation" of symptoms, said Maj. Dennis Kilian, 3rd Army/U.S. Army Central force health prevention officer.

Although half of scorpion stings result in little or no venom spread to the victim, Soldiers who are stung by a scorpion have a 50-percent chance of sharing Garvin's experience, Kilian said.

But out of the six stings reported at Camp Buehring during the last year, Garvin stood out as the only one to get venom injected.

He also stood out because he normally works with the same servicemembers who treated him for the sting. "They all know him, and they were all very concerned," said Maj. Brian Copeland, 981st Medical Detachment commander. Copeland also was wryly amused that an expert on scorpions was stung by one.

Now recovered, Garvin has already started receiving nicknames, such as "Captain Scorpion" and "The Scorpion King." Colleagues drop by with witty remarks such as, "There are better ways to make a name for yourself," and "You don't have to get stung to be able to teach Soldiers about the effects of scorpion venom."

It's "like being something between a celebrity and a circus freak," Garvin said with a smile.

He only had 30 days to go before finishing his first deployment, but he now has a story to tell and a souvenir to show. Garvin preserved the crushed scorpion that stung him and plans to use it in further teachings of dangers troops face in the Middle East.

"We all have to take something back," Kilian said.